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Intelligence in the Crisis

The following is directed to those whose knowledge of the Stennis Preparedness Subcommittee Report on the Cuban military buildup is limited to the information contained in the recent letter of Congressman Stratton. They may well be confused about the findings of this Subcommittee.

The Stennis Subcommittee unanimously reported that the intelligence agencies did a "credible job" in collecting information on the military buildup beginning last July, but that several "substantial errors" were made in the evaluation of information. The following errors were cited in the report:

"... the number of Soviet troops in Cuba was substantially underestimated ..."

"... indications that strategic missiles were being installed were not given proper weight ..."

"There also appeared to be a tendency ... to discredit and downgrade refugee and exile reports."

"... the analysts were strongly influenced by their philosophical judgment that it would be contrary to Soviet policy to introduce strategic missiles into Cuba."

I agree with Congressman Stratton that it is unfair to lay the blame for errors on the entire intelligence community. I think it is important to find out whose preconception that the Soviet Union would never introduce strategic missiles into Cuba led the Administration to downgrade credible reports and to deny until Oct. 20, 1962, that such missiles were there.

In view of the fact that John McCone reported on Aug. 10, 1962, his belief that the Soviet Union was preparing to introduce such missiles into Cuba, it is impossible to understand why some clung to a belief about Soviet behavior that proved to be tragically false.

McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant to the President for National Security, told the Nation on Oct. 14, 1962, by television:

"I know there is no present evidence, and I think there is no present likelihood that the Cubans and the Cuban government and the Soviet government would in combination

attempt to install major offensive capability."

It is ironic that, several hours before Mr. Bundy spoke, photographs of medium-range missile sites had been taken in the San Cristobal area. Mr. Bundy could not have known for sure what these photographs were to reveal. But, for at least three weeks before Oct. 14, there was evidence of the presence of strategic missiles in Cuba—evidence which identified their location and directed the flight of Oct. 14 to the very area which yielded the photographic proof.

Further, five days before Mr. Bundy's television appearance, our intelligence had positively established by photographic evidence the presence in Cuba of an offensive capability in the form of the Soviet bomber, the IL-28. This fact was made known to the Nation by Secretary McNamara in his telethon of Feb. 6, 1963.

What the Stennis Subcommittee report establishes beyond doubt is that the Administration was guilty of misinforming the public last September and October.

Some instances of misinformation are listed in the Appendix to the Report of the House Republican Special Subcommittee on Cuba and Subversion in the Western Hemisphere.

That the Administration was in possession of information that should have commanded (even to McGeorge Bundy) a high degree of credibility that strategic missiles were in Cuba before the photographs of Oct. 14 were taken, is made quite clear by the Stennis report.

There can be no doubt that there was an intelligence failure in respect to Cuba last fall. This Nation cannot afford to run the risks of another such failure. Consequently, it is to be hoped that the Stennis Subcommittee's subsequent reports will more clearly pinpoint responsibility for failure, both in and out of the intelligence community, and also absolve from unjust suspicion those who cannot be charged with the errors cited in the Subcommittee's first report.

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